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IDENTITY THEFT: HOLLY BEDOTTO'S STORY

On Monday, February 4, the Miami Dade County Consumer Services Department held a symposium on Identity Theft to begin its celebration of National Consumer Protection Week.

In addition to the panel of experts, the symposium featured the testimony of an actual victim, psychologist Dr. Holly Bedotto.

The following is her story.

“About a year ago my parents started getting collections notices from a company in New York. They threw them out. I’ve never lived in New York.

And then finally my father faxed me one of them and I realized it was from a cable company. I called them and they said that somebody by the name of Mrs. Bedatto (I’ve never gone by Mrs. Bedatto) had opened up cable in my name, using my social security number. So I told them that I’d always lived in Florida and that I was employed here.

I didn't really think too much about it.

And then I thought,"Somebody has my social security number?"

I called the Social Security Administration. They told me to call the Federal Trade Commission. That's when I realized the problem that I was about to deal with.

Six hours later I called all three of the credit agencies to get a copy of my credit [report] and to let them know that somebody had my social security number and I needed to check those credit reports to make sure that nobody had charged anything. I found out later that somebody did. They opened up a credit card [account] in my name and charged about \$13,000.

I had to call the bank. I had to call all my credit card [companies]. I filed a police report in New York. And then the other agencies were informed after that.

Eventually, two months later when I tried to take out a second mortgage on my home, I realized that there was still a problem.

Luckily my banker helped me and we cleared up my credit. There are a few credit card companies that are very good. They send me a new credit card every month. And I make sure that I shred all of my papers and tear things up. Now I think about things that I didn't think about before."

The FBI says Identity theft is the fast growing crime across the United States. Statistics compiled by the Federal Trade Commission list Florida as the fourth worst state in terms of the number of identify theft incidents reported and Miami as the fifth worst city in the county.

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The Miami Dade Consumer Services Department is an agency of Miami-Dade County government that protects consumers through complaint mediation, business regulation, and consumer education. The Department operates the Consumer Hotline (305) 375-3677, a central telephone number for consumer complaints and information.